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LEGEND OF THE GRAVE AT SPANISH FORT



COURTEOUSLY DEDICATED TO
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Legend of
The Graue at Spanish Fort
*tragic tale of a brave soldier's
love preserved in the legend*
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BY J. H. DEGRANGE,

1881

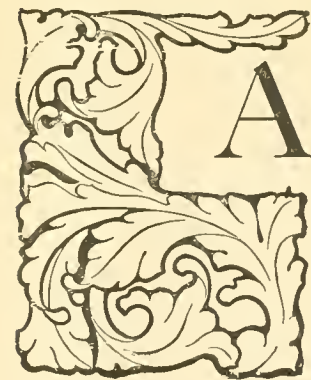
Should you ask me whence these stories ?
Whence these legends and traditions,
With the odors of the forest,
With the dew and damp of meadows,
With the curling smoke of Wigwams,
With the rushing of great rivers,
With their frequent repetitions,
And their wild reverberations,
As the thunder in the mountains ?
I should answer, I should tell you,
“ From the forests and the prairies ”.

(HIAWATHA)



OWAISSEE

Legend of the Grave at Spanish Fort



AS I WAS wandering through the grove at Spanish Fort I saw a very old man sitting on the side of the bayou fishing. I went and sat near him, when, after a time, by dint of questioning, I overcame his reticence and he told me this legend, just as I give it to you, in substance. I do not vouch for it, but it is a legend passed from mouth to mouth: ¶“Do you want to know whose grave that is,” said the white-haired old fisherman at Spanish Fort, pointing to an inclosure with an iron railing surrounded by four large trees so obviously symmetrically placed as to mark the place: “Ah, senor, my father’s father came from Spain with his majesty’s troops when they landed at Biloxi, and wandering across the country, they crossed this big lake and landed at this place where the Hidalgos and the Commandant Sancho Pablo---God bless his soul, founded this fort. They believed then that this natural stream ran to the river, so searching parties were immediately sent out, and soon found tha it did not, but at the juncture of this bayou, which they called St. John in honor of the tholy St. John, they being good Catholics, they found this location to be a good one to protect any future city that they might locate further



GRAVE OF SANCHO PABLO

Legend of the Grave at Spanish Fort

inland as well as from invasion or re-enforcement of the Choctaws, the great Southern tribe of Indians now in this section of the country.

When the fort was built, just as you see it now and garrisoned by the flower of the Spanish army, the genuine routine of the fort life began and continued for some time. You see that island in the middle of Bayou St. John, about two miles towards the city---well, that was the camp of the Indian chief, Waw-he-wawa (white goose), where he and his lovely daughter Owaissee (Bluebird), and the mighty warriors camped and lived for a while, until he would bring them to other sections of the country, for the great warring tribes met once a year in other sections of the country. There were the Iroquois and the Mohawks and the Choctaws and the Oneidas and the Shawnees and the Blackfeet and the Pawnees and the Omahas and the Mandans and the Chippewas and the Dacotahs and the Hurons and Ojibwas, who all met to pow-wow for the Indian country, until dissension would come between them and they would war among themselves, but, until that time, they would pow-wow for the general good against the pale face man. This pow-wow generally took place near the Sault Saint Marie, but at the time that I speak of, the tribes were at peace and the Choctaws were here.

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One of the delights of the lovely Owaïsee when the moon was up was to paddle in her swift canoe to the great waters (Lake Pontchartrain) to fish, to enjoy herself, to breathe the pure air on its grand and broad expanse under the limpid light of the silvery moon. She was tall, straight as an arrow, lovely in feature and in form lithe as the cane break, and her motion was as wavering as the reeds that moved about by the sighing winds on both sides of the bayou. For a while after the arrival of the garrison she kept aloof, but as time passed on and when the strangers' pale-faced, smoked the pipe of peace in front of her father's wigwam, she became accustomed to seeing them daily, for that was the first time that Sancho Pablo saw this lovely daughter of the chief sitting in front of his wigwam plaiting baskets and mats from reeds.

One day, or rather one evening, while on the lake enjoying herself as she was wont to, a severe squall suddenly arose, so common on this lake, the waves waxed wroth and beat above her shallow canoe until she was nigh exhausted in her efforts to protect herself. The Commandant Sancho Pablo, who had been watching her for some time, saw the danger in which she was from the battlement where he stood. He immediately called for help, had one of his powerful boats manned and went out to rescue her, and luckily he did, for he reached her frail bark just



THE ISLAND

Legend of the Grave at Spanish Fort

as it was about to collapse. He seized her, placed her in his boat and by the mighty efforts of his crew brought her safely to the fort, and then brought her safely to her father's wigwam. He was met with profuse thanks and then went his way. It was a revelation to this Bluebird—simple child of the forest, to see and be saved by this tall and very handsome white-faced man in his casque and accoutrement of a Spanish officer, it was not good that this maiden, this daughter of this great chief should meet this pale face; this stranger who smoked the pipe of peace. He had seen her, she had seen him, and looking back as he departed, she had heard her father praise him, praise his wisdom and his courage, and wonder would he come again?

Every day after the rescue as she paddled down the bayou, Sancho Pablo watched for her, watched for her limped eye, for her blue-black hair and lovely form. This continued for a time until her hour changed as the days rolled by, it became later and later every evening, until, instead of going over the bosom of the great waters, she would stop near the fort, right there yonder, near that big oak, which you see from here, to meet the commandant, and there in sweet converse she passed and whiled away many and many hours with him.



THE TRYSTING

Legend of the Grave at Spanish Fort

Waw-he-wawa, the great chief, soon noticed that Owaissee was becoming listless in her weaving, she would stop and dream and ponder at times when she should be at work about her duties, which were not accomplished with that cheerfulness which had been her wont—a change had come over the spirit of her dreams—her glances were drooping and she seemed always to long for the evening, she was thinking of the stranger that came from the land over the waters, not this big water, but the greater waters, the people are very fierce and often there is war between us—friction and wounds that ache and still may ache—she was thinking of the white man, she was thinking of another tribe and another country, for this man, this pale face, this Sancho, was very tall and very handsome. He had come to her at spring time. This was mystery to the mighty chief warrior, so one night he followed her, followed her steadily down the bayou with his paddle making no noise, and from the opposite side he saw the tryst under this great oak, he saw it with his own eyes, he saw, to his dismay, his lovely daughter and the commandant standing side by side, hand in hand together, so close that they seemed united into one—and anger sprang to his bosom, he swore a mighty oath, he cried out, raising his arms to heaven: “I will slay this pale face man, as long and as wide as the world may be, as rude and rough as the way may be, my wrath shall down him and my vengeance shall reach him!”

Legend of the Grave at Spanish Fort

One dark night Waw-he-wawa came alone. He came to the trysting place, gave the signal, and the commandant, Sancho Pablo, unsuspecting of the treacheries and the deceit of the dark, dusky race, came out to meet, as he believed, the lovely damsel, this dusky maiden so beautiful, and pass the hours with her—when he was suddenly met by this mighty chief warrior, Waw-he-wawa. A struggle, fierce and short, took place, and the commandant, Sancho Pablo fell under the murderous blow of Waw-he-wawa, murmuring even in his dying breath his deep, dearest devotion and love for Owaissee. The noise soon alarmed the garrison, but the Indian had fled through the bushes and no trace could be found of him. The body was tenderly cared for and after the usual ceremony of the war camp, Sancho Pablo was buried right there in that spot which is marked by the trees, for the trees were planted and grew in his memory, raising their branches high to heaven as an altar to this lovely affection—so tragic in its ending.”

“What became of Owaissee and the tribe?”

“The tribe went away, and—Owaissee? *Quien sabe.*”

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